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THE INCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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In the fall of 1894 the writer was appointed first assistant in one of the public schools of Cincinnati. At that time there was little or no move in public education toward industrial training, so most that was current was given in private or semi-private institutions. At the time our city had two such, namely, the Technical School, now many years out of existence, and the Ohio Mechanics Institute, still one of the prominent schools of its kind in the country.

But it is of the former school I wish to speak in this connection, as the one that helped me, or rather one of my pupils, out of very serious difficulty, and convinced me of the desperate need for industrial training in connection with *public* instruction.

As a member of my class in the school first mentioned I had a boy, we shall call him John, who was nearly sixteen years of age, and had never taken kindly to language or grammar. As his class was the last before the high school, he began to see the seriousness of his neglect along these lines—not all his fault I am sure—and he so expressed himself to me. He engaged my sympathy at once, for I had remembered some difficulties I had encountered along similar lines when I was a boy.

In those days such equipment as his would not permit him to enter any high school, for I am reasonably safe in saying he did not know the difference between a verb and a preposition. But during the lesson in grammar he could make a drawing of the face of the teacher, which was in no sense a caricature. This phase of his ability gave me the cue as to what might be done for him. Knowing both the superintendent and the principal of the technical school previously mentioned, I talked the situation over with them with all the persuasive powers at my command, begging them to take the boy, to forget his shortcomings, and to magnify to him his peculiar talents, which I was sure were along mechanical lines and

worth developing. They not only acceded to my request, but did it without money and without price, for John, like many another had neither, but he did have an ambition to make something of himself. He walked three miles back and forth for three years daily, the walk giving him renewed health and strength, and the work he loved giving him an insight into the great world of things.

The sequel is, that for many years John has been superintendent of the lighting plant of a large city; and this incident has always seemed to me a terrible rebuke to the old régime then dominant in high schools, which, in those days, could offer John nothing save a sneer. Today our high schools cater to every educational desire of every ambitious youth, giving him abundant opportunity to magnify his peculiar powers of both mind and body; and he who poses as an educator today, and does not see that the world of things and their manifold combinations developed through the manual side is of equal value with the world of thought developed through the intellectual side only, is truly an object of pity, and one who should scarcely be permitted to run at large.

The facts related above took such a vital hold on me in connection with my school work, and seemed to me to reinforce so fully the further facts that the industrial abilities which I had acquired back on the farm had been and still are of such incalculable value to me that the resolution to promote industrial education became a fixed part of my educational creed. The memory of the above lesson, for it is a lesson in educational equity, kept the need for industrial training constantly in my mind till I had opportunity to give it expression in the school of which I am now the head.

I began the work in 1903 after the following manner. Noting the fact that our district had within it some twenty or more factories of various kinds, and that they were sapping the life of our school, I sent to the heads of these factories, not one of whom lived in the district, a circular letter asking their co-operation in establishing a manual training department in our school. If such a step could be taken I was sure that it would raise the standard of efficiency of the boys and girls the factories were getting from us, it would make these boys and girls more useful to themselves, and must sooner or later, lead to higher standards in the community. Imagine my surprise, when a hearty response to this appeal came in, in the

way of checks, till I had in sight almost one thousand dollars. Imagine my further surprise at this time, when a then prominent member of the Board of Education came to me and ordered that I desist, that the board, meaning himself, wanted none of it. I desisted, but for a short time only, for soon there came a new superintendent on the scene who saw these matters much as I did; a new régime was inaugurated, and manual training again raised its voice, this time without the danger of being suppressed.

At first some of the schools of the city were supplied with manual-training centers. Our school had one of the first of these centers through the recommendation of the superintendent, who had but to present to the board a copy of the circular letter referred to, and announce the response thereto. From this time—1905—on, the work was carried on in a more or less conventional manner till the spring of 1911. When I say “conventional,” I mean that our boys and girls from the sixth grade up were getting one period per week of manual work, but, to my way of thinking, not enough to establish either habit or efficiency along this line. Also, I noted that I had within my school some 50 boys and girls below the fifth grade who were from two to five years behind the normal grades. That is to say, they were—most of them—of that unfortunate class that had seen more trouble in their short lives than most of us see in a lifetime. I was constantly asking myself, “Where do these folks come in?” “What is our school doing for these that shall help them to function in life?” In order to hold them in school I was keeping the Truant Department and the Juvenile Court busy. In my desperation, and with a constantly growing sympathy for the pupils, I went to the superintendent with a plan for an entirely new organization, one that was really revolutionary in its relation to what had obtained, but one that I was sure would meet the needs of the community, and one upon which I was ready to stake my reputation if I had any.

After thinking it over carefully, the superintendent gave me carte blanche in putting into operation a plan of which the following is a brief description. All pupils of the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades under the new regulations are getting two periods per week of an hour and a half each. The subnormal pupils found in the fourth, third, and second grades are getting three periods per week,

the boys in the shop, and the girls all phases of domestic economy, including cooking, the simpler scientific values of foods, sewing, the use of the sewing machine, the simpler forms of cutting, fitting, etc.

They miss much of their regular class work while in the Industrial Department, but this is more than made up to them in the following manner: When the eighth-year pupils go to the Industrial Department, the subnormals leave their regular grade rooms and go to the eighth-year teacher for special work in arithmetic and geography. The work in arithmetic is such as will help them in the Industrial Department. When the pupils of the seventh grades go to the Industrial Department, the subnormals go to these teachers for special work in English, history, etc. Thus through segregation and individual work in which they are treated according to age and not according to grade, these pupils are getting work that is not only highly pleasing to them, but such as many of them would never get under the old régime, for a child aged fifteen in the second or third grade will scarcely reach the upper grades even of the elementary school. What we are trying to do with every student is, to treat him as though each day were his last with us.

The work of the eighth grade is so different from the others as to require special mention. These pupils give one-fifth of their time to industrial work. During this time the boys get twenty lessons in cooking, learning not only the scientific values of foods, but also their preparation into meals necessarily plain but substantial. Along with this they are given instruction in improvising camp equipment, such as the utilization of cast-off cans for cooking utensils, etc. Besides this they will get twenty lessons in the simpler forms of sewing, such as hemming, darning, sewing on of buttons, and the like. The girls in turn are given the same number of lessons in the use of the simpler tools. The work done even thus far would do credit to boys of any grade. What about these pupils when they go to high school? We expect that they will not only be as well prepared, but even better than under the old methods, and if they are not, our whole scheme fails. We are confident however that it will not fail.

In none of our shop work are we doing what is usually seen, the making of set pieces. On the other hand, everything made or done

has intrinsic value. To illustrate, this fall—1911—the eighth grade made two dozen book-binding presses for the pupils in the bindery of one of the high schools. The seventh grades made one hundred looms for the salesmanship class of the Continuation School. The sixth grades made thirty botany presses for high-school students. One fifth grade made sixteen window boxes, 42"×10"×8" for a neighboring school; the other fifth grade made fifty desk book-racks for teachers. The subnormal of the fourth grade, and the subnormals of the third and second grades each made sixty of the book-racks, and to their credit be it said, the work was as good as the best. Besides this more or less formal work, the boys are given opportunity to work on pieces of their own designing, after the plans and specifications have been approved by the master. Also repairing of all sorts is going on all the time, either on things belonging to the school, or on broken furniture or what not brought from the homes. This constitutes another means of uniting more closely the school and the home.

In the conduct of the various classes among the boys, the foreman plan is used, that is, each class is divided into two groups, each under the direction of a foreman selected from their number. It is the business of the foreman to supervise the work as is done in a real shop. This foreman makes his reports to the master, and submits to him all differences that may arise. This method makes possible a much larger range of work, creates a stimulating rivalry, and gives to the boys much that is like the real activities of shop life. To say it holds their attention is putting it mildly.

Above all is the moral effect of all this work, which is most pronounced. I have spoken concerning the Juvenile Court and the Truant Department. The present need for these is about nil. The question of discipline, formerly a difficult one, especially among the subnormals, has nearly eliminated itself. The general school spirit, both among pupils and parents, has become most satisfactory. To be brief, the whole community has become so interested in the school and its work, that the school has become unconsciously a community center around which many of its activities revolve and with it all, good teaching has played a most important part.